

YES! WYCOMBE CLINCH IT IN INJURY TIME

IT CAN only be described as one of the most dramatic finishes of all time at Loakes Park. Wycombe Wanderers seem all set to drop two more Rothmans Isthmian League points at home to Ilford on Saturday when the match enters injury time at 1-1.

One . . . two minutes tick away. In the third Wycombe force two corners — still no goal. Then, in the FOURTH minute a last ditch effort sees Keith Searle cross the ball once more. At the far post is Steve Perrin, unmarked. In a flash he pounces on the ball and sends it racing past Paul Smith and into the net. It was a fairy-tale ending.

For a few seconds the pitch was invaded but as soon as order had been regained, Ilford had just enough time to re-start before referee J. Godfrey of Watford ended the match in its 95th minute.

So just why all the time added on? It wasn't injuries (there were precious few). It could only be time wasting and Ilford were guilty of that. Whether they wasted five minutes is unlikely and no doubt they felt absolutely

shattered by the result, but they have only themselves to blame and one particular incident immediately springs to mind. Midway through the second half, Ilford's former First Division player Mark Lazarus prepared for a free kick. One of his teammates was tying up his boot lace in the penalty area. Lazarus waited . . . then he stooped and tied up his own laces. Referee Godfrey ran a good 30 yards across the pitch to have words with Lazarus although no action was taken. The incident must have taken over half a minute and the referee's authority was obviously undermined.

If Wanderers do take the title this term, they will look back on this encounter as perhaps one of the key turning points in the campaign. Three points on Saturday will have given them a psychological boost over Bishop's Stortford and Hendon, who were both involved in cup competitions. The Blues' success will also have put them in the right frame of mind for Hendon's visit to Loakes Park tonight (Tuesday).

But while celebrating their unexpected triumph, Wycombe would do well to remember their

first half performance — victory then, looked a long way off.

Manager Brian Lee took a gamble in recalling Phil Wood to midfield and pushing Larry Pritchard up front. The man to go was Steve Perrin, dropped to substitute. The gamble failed. It was in midfield where Wycombe struggled throughout the first 45 minutes and only when Pritchard returned to his usual position, with Reardon in the middle of the three, did Wycombe realise their full potential.

As at Leatherhead on Thursday, the whole side looked shaky early on. John Maskell in particular had a worrying afternoon and in the first 30 seconds was unversed when he slipped on the damp grass collecting Paul Birdseye's back pass. A minute later, Wycombe created their first of many chances that went unaccepted.

Dave Guiver's back pass slid under the boot of Paddy Betson and gave Pritchard the chance of a shot but he drove straight at keeper Paul Smith from long range when he might have done better to take the ball further into the area.

Losing Amateur Cup finalists Ilford, without midfield maestro Roger Day and striker John Butterfield (both injured), replied strongly playing neat, positive football. At the back they were well served by their former Wycombe centre half Peter Anderson, who dominated the aerial battle. It was an astute move to make him skipper for the day.

Adrian Eglete, the balding little ex-Ajax forward, had a great chance to put his side ahead in the 17th minute after Roger Grant's attempted clearance was half blocked. The ball squirted out to Eglete at the far post but his drive flew across the face of goal. Then Lazarus, their other permit player, headed wide after Eglete beat Paul Birdseye on the flank.

Wycombe looked distinctly rattled. Phil Wood struggled to get a grip on midfield while Reardon, playing on the right hand side of the midfield trio, was seldom in the game and Mick Hollifield had his hands full marking Lazarus. Up front Searle was coming off worse with Anderson. But still the chances were there.

Tony Horseman struck the side-netting with a half-hit shot under pressure after 24 minutes and then a simple "up and under" from Dave Bullock sailed deep into the Ilford penalty area. Smith stayed on his line as Pritchard met the ball on the volley (quite a feat considering the height of the ball) but the shot was driven straight at the goalkeeper.

Wanderers began to improve. Hollifield latched onto a Pritchard through ball and drove into the side-netting and then Horseman ran half the length of the pitch when Betson and Anderson were deceived by the bounce, before passing to Pritchard who fired just over.

Then, with 36 minutes gone, Wycombe handed Ilford a gift. There seemed little danger as Keith Mead gathered Betson's long pass with Tony Turley in pursuit. Maskell came off his line to collect the pass back but Mead sent the ball over the goalkeeper's head and although Maskell raced back in a bid to keep the ball out, he could only help it into the net. The blame for the error must lie with both players but it emphasised the uncertainty in the home defence.

The amazing winning goal at the end overshadowed this incident, but had the match ended at 1-1, the own goal would have had far greater significance.

Wycombe could muster little in reply to the breakthrough before the interval but in the early stages of the second half, they carved out a string of chances. In the first 30 seconds Birdseye's deep cross was headed into the area by Searle, giving Reardon a great chance. Terry sent the ball high into the crowd.

It was a complete reversal of the first 45 minutes. More determined, Wycombe looked certain to score. Pritchard was next to try for goal when Reardon put him through but Smith saved Ilford again.

A big cheer heralded the arrival of Perrin in place of Wood, Pritchard switching to midfield. Four minutes later, Wycombe were on level terms. It was a classic goal. Reardon and Pritchard combined brilliantly outside the Ilford box, Reardon pushing a perfectly weighted ball through for his skipper to cross into the area. Searle was left unmarked for one crucial second and thumped a fine header into the back of the net. It was Keith's fourth goal in four games since his injury.

Although failing to capitalise on the breakthrough, Wanderers looked far happier. Mr. Godfrey's whistle spoilt many flowing moves while Ilford eased themselves out of trouble with a series of close passing moves. Turley, strangely quiet in this game, gave way to Jeff Bookman in the 78th minute.

In the closing stages Searle drove wide and then Horseman hit the bar with a header but was adjudged offside. In the 90th minute Ilford went close themselves when Peter Drabwell stepped over a Lazarus corner for Anderson to hammer in a powerful drive which, fortunately for Wycombe, was blocked.

The match then entered those amazing five minutes of injury time . . . amazing!

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Betson, R. Grant, T. Reardon, P. Wood (sub. S. Perrin 59 mins.), D. Hollifield, A. Horseman, K. Searle, L. Pritchard.

ILFORD: P. Smith, D. Bowhill, P. Betson, P. Anderson, D. Guiver, M. Bennett, R. Carvell, M. Lazarus, T. Turley (sub. J. Bookman 78 mins.), P. Drabwell, A. Eglete.

Referee: J. Godfrey (Watford).
Halftime: 0-1. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Searle (63), Perrin (94); Ilford — Mead o.g. (36).

Official paying attendance: 1,488. **Approx. total attendance:** 1,600.

By STUART EARP Wycombe W. 2, Ilford 1